

Hiring in Bahrain's Healthcare Industry: Recruitment Methods and Nationality

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2017

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Sociology

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Abstract

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Although sociologists have begun to examine the employer-side of the hiring process, we know little about recruitment methods. Using the understudied yet internationally consequential context of a Gulf Cooperation Council country, Bahrain, this paper describes the role of job seekers' nationalities in the recruitment process, from the perspective of employers. Using in-depth interviews with employers in Bahrain's healthcare industry, the results indicate that employers use job seekers' nationalities as a proxy for their potential fit with the job position, and labor supply. Nationality is socially constructed as worker identities – using nationality as a means of ranking potential workers, employers choose recruitment methods to target specific nationalities that are seen as most ideal for a given job position. The recruitment process is also a site where employers construct nationalities and worker identities, through information they learn about potential worker supply. Consideration of the role of nationality and recruitment methods helps to understand stratification of the workforce in this region.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of nationality is highly entangled with all aspects of society in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Perhaps the most important of these is the labor market, with the central role it plays in bringing large numbers of expatriates¹ to these countries through labor migration. Although there is no doubt that labor markets and nationality go hand in hand, the relationship remains largely unexplored in many important respects. Gardner (2010) describes a key way that researchers see nationality playing out through labor markets in GCC countries:

The various national and ethnic groups that migrate to [Bahrain] find their way – or are slotted – into particular types of work: Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis work in construction and the service sector, Filipinos work as concierges and run beauty parlors, whereas Indonesian and Sri Lankan women work as housemaids... Employers in the region come to believe that particular sorts of people – specific ethnicities or nationalities – are ‘naturally’ better for certain sorts of positions and hire accordingly. (P. 30)

Gardner importantly highlights the directionality of this relationship – employers draw on widespread beliefs about particular nationalities’ suitability for certain jobs, and then choose workers accordingly that reproduces this stratification. However, he also reveals the superficiality of this current understanding of this phenomenon – the association of nationalities with certain jobs is not a simple, straightforward process. The resulting structuring of labor markets by nationality is taken for granted, without first understanding how this happens. In other words, we need to understand how and why employers believe that certain nationalities are

¹ To clarify the terminology – “expatriate”, “expat”, “non-Bahraini”, “non-citizen”, “non-native”, and “immigrant” are synonyms for individuals who are not Bahraini citizens.

“Bahraini”, “native”, “local” and “citizen” are interchangeable, indicating individuals who are Bahraini citizens.

inherently suited for particular jobs. An important first step in this endeavor is to understand the current situation..

The employment relationship between employers and job seekers traverses the demand and supply sides of the labor market, and researchers widely consider both to be lacking when it comes to GCC countries. However, the demand side, comprised of employers' hiring procedures, can be regarded "more fundamental as a determinant of inequality, opportunity, and organizational attainments than the supply side" (Bills, Di Stasio, and Gërkhani 2017).

Employers are agents embedded in larger social structures, facing constraints and opportunities in order to make decisions about hiring. Decisions about recruitment channels are especially important because they are the first step in the process – employers conveying information about the availability of job positions to job seekers. Studying these processes on the demand side of labor markets in GCC countries not only contributes to the currently lacking knowledge about these labor markets themselves, but also develops a more complex understanding of upstream sources of stratification and inequalities that then percolate from labor markets to other aspects of society. It is necessary to consider how employers' recruitment decisions, especially the ones that they currently make, tie into the association of nationalities with jobs.

This study contributes to these gaps in existing knowledge, to understand the role of nationality in employers' recruitment decisions. This descriptive analysis is driven by the following research questions: *How do employers search for workers? Why do employers choose these recruitment channels?* Using in-depth interviews with employers in Bahrain's healthcare industry, I use employers as a unit of analysis to develop an understanding of how they recruit workers of different skill levels, and how these decisions are shaped by constraints and opportunities. This study provides a description of the current state of Bahrain's healthcare

industry – these findings serve as groundwork for future studies addressing the larger question of how this state of the labor market came to be. I find that employers use nationality as a proxy to rank potential job seekers, and these rankings vary by job. Employers then select recruitment methods that target the nationality that is most highly ranked. Nationalities are socially constructed as worker identities, based on the non-representative pools of job seekers they constitute in Bahrain’s healthcare industry. I describe the ranking of nationalities, and the subsequent targeted recruitment methods for job types of varying skill levels. I also find that the supply of workers influences employers’ demand of workers, through the recruitment process. Employers positively respond to unsolicited contact by job seekers and labor intermediaries, influencing their subsequent hiring decisions. Additionally, I find preliminary evidence suggesting that nationality is not the only ascriptive characteristic at play, but rather a more complex interplay of nationality with ethnicity and country of training.

This study is not meant to be statistically generalizable to all GCC countries and industries, let alone labor markets outside of this region. Rather, this paper contributes to the currently lacking knowledge of recruitment in these contexts, laying the groundwork for much-needed explanatory work in this area. Descriptive analysis is both appropriate and necessary at this stage in the development of knowledge about this topic, prior to delving into explanatory work: we cannot know why GCC labor markets work the way they do, especially in terms of an explanatory and historicized approach, without first having a descriptive understanding of the current state of these markets. GCC labor markets are not only locally and regionally important, but also internationally consequential because of their central position in many migration streams from across the world. Understanding recruitment in GCC labor markets has consequences for a wide range of transnational issues, ranging from local unemployment, to GCC political stability,

to international labor migration. Learning about a core component of these markets, the recruitment of workers, is an important area of inquiry.

This study and its contributions build on and differ from existing studies in the following ways. Firstly, this is one of the few studies that examines the hiring process for jobs of varying skill levels, ranking from administrative staff who require a college degree with no work experience, all the way up to doctors with particular specializations, training, and extensive work experience. This variation in the skill level of workers contributes to the literature on how employers' hiring decisions vary intra-organizationally, and for different types of workers – it is usually methodologically difficult to access to data examining job positions of different skill levels for a single employer.

Secondly, this study draws attention to the importance of studying the concept of recruitment methods as a key first step in the employment relationship, especially with the lack of research on the demand side of labor markets. This study clearly indicates the importance of recruitment methods in stratifying the workforce, which few existing studies examine. Rather than focusing on a single recruitment method, this study examines the broader concept of recruitment methods as a distinct means of workforce stratification.

Thirdly, I conceptualize the social construction of nationalities as non-representative worker identities, which guides employers' decisions about recruitment methods. There is no existing research that breaks down the association of nationalities with particular job types, which is an impediment to correcting the workforce stratification. This conceptualization adds nuance to our understanding of how recruitment works in this region, which paves the way for exploring possible ameliorative policies.

Fourthly, existing studies largely rely on survey research, which provides descriptive statistics on how employers find workers, but does not provide a rich, qualitative description of how employers understand and make decisions about this process. Additionally, I describe how employers use workers' nationality in the recruitment process, paving the way for future studies addressing the historicization of the labor market's stratification by nationality. Lastly, I provide preliminary evidence that labor markets are not simply organized by nationality, but rather there is a more complex situation of meaning making occurring, which involves the job seeker's ethnicity and country of training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is very little existing sociological literature on recruitment methods, let alone in the specific context of the GCC. With this absence of existing knowledge in mind, to provide a framing of this issue this section will (1) review relevant contextual information, (2) provide a theoretical framework of the job/person matching process, (3) examine relevant existing literature on nationality in GCC labor markets, and (4) review studies addressing nationality and recruitment methods in GCC labor markets. This section will review where these gaps exist, and the importance of addressing them.

Context

The GCC² is a regional political and economic unit consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)³. The formal unity as a political and economic alliance, as reflected in the empirical reality of social, economic, and political similarities, is the primary reason that I draw comparisons across these countries. This is reflected in the literature, where numerous studies examine the GCC states in unison (Fasano and Goyal 2006; Kapiszewski 2006).

Nationality is a politically and legally central concept to these countries, especially in their labor markets, and particularly in terms of tensions between natives and expatriates. All six GCC countries have significant proportions of expatriates in their national populations as well as their workforces. This continual dependence on international labor migration is found across these countries, with the proportion of expatriates in the workforce ranging from 56.0% in Saudi Arabia to 92.9% in the UAE (Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population 2014). 79.6% of Bahrain's workforce population of 767,292 consists of non-citizens (Labour Market Regulatory

² Researchers refer to geographic areas in this region using a range terms with varying meanings. The terms "Middle East", "MENA" ("Middle East and North Africa"), and "Arab States" can have varying and geographically imprecise meanings. Meanwhile, the formality of the GCC alliance clearly specifies the inclusion of six countries with many shared characteristics, which aids our analysis in this study.

³ Recent tensions in the Gulf region indicate potential volatility of the GCC. However, this primarily questions the inclusion of Qatar, which little of this paper and the relevant literature focuses on. Despite recent events, for the purposes of this paper I will continue to assume that the GCC remains a unified unit that can be studied as such.

Authority 2017). As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of expatriate workers in Bahrain migrate from South Asia, with a sizeable population also from the Philippines. Both Indians and Bangladeshis outnumber Bahrainis in the workforce. However, there are also workers from other regions of the Middle East and Africa, as well as the US and UK. The numbers for other GCC nationalities in the Bahraini workforce are not reported separately – these are included in the “Other” category in Table 1.

Table 1. Bahrain’s Workforce by Nationality, 2017.

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Number</u>
India	221,449
Bangladesh	164,377
Bahrain	157,119
Pakistan	44,771
Philippines	30,539
Nepal	14,178
Egypt	9,141
Sri Lanka	4,271
Jordan	3,093
Yemen	2,486
UK	2,371
Thailand	1,644
Syria	1,441
Morocco	1,381
China	1,340
Kenya	1,223
Turkey	1,160
Sudan	1,133
USA	983
Ethiopia	960
Lebanon	919
Other	121,211
<u>Total</u>	<u>787,190</u>

Source: Labour Market Regulatory Authority, 2017

This reliance on expatriate labor in both public and private sectors across the GCC has led to the concentration of native workers in the public sector, where they receive higher wages, have flexible hours, and are more likely to be “guaranteed” a job (Kapiszewski 2006). Moreover, levels of native unemployment are growing with the saturation of the public sector, and natives’ unwillingness to accept lower wages and less flexible working conditions in the private sector (Kapiszewski 2006). Expatriate workers fill jobs across the spectrum of skill level and wages, but much research and media attention continues to focus solely on low-skill and low-wage workers.

The emergence of governmental responses to this worsening situation of foreign labor reliance, in the form of workforce nationalization policies, is a key part of this story. Although these policies differ from one GCC country to another in the specific policy recommendations and timeframes, these policies are unified in their aim to incentivize employers to hire nationals, and provide disincentives to hiring expatriates. Looking specifically at Bahrain’s workforce nationalization policies, Hertog (2014) describes multiple waves of reform policies starting in the 1990s. First-round policies, composed of quotas for proportions of an organization’s employees of Bahraini origin, proved ineffective. A second set of policies emerged in 2008, focusing on fining employers a flat amount for each expatriate hired, and giving expatriates the mobility to change employer. Limited quotas for Bahraini workers remain in place.

Inequalities along the lines of nationality are most evident with academic and media attention on low-skilled expatriate workers, especially domestic workers and manual laborers primarily from non-Middle Eastern regions of Asia and Africa. Research has shown that these categories of workers not only receive extremely low wages, but also face unsafe or even abusive workplaces, poor working conditions, and an inability to change employers of their own accord

(Murray 2012). There is comparatively less information about inequalities among higher-skilled workers, even in light of multitudes of anecdotal evidence. The lack of knowledge about this is furthered by GCC governments' decision to not publicly release data about wage differences by specific nationality (that is to say, going beyond the broad native versus non-GCC expatriate dichotomy). Moreover, I have reason to not include several datasets provided by governments because of their apparent inaccuracy. For instance, a 2011 breakdown of Bahraini workers by occupation, sex, and Bahraini or non-Bahraini citizenship indicates that the entire country has only four cashiers—this example is logically very unlikely, indicating major flaws in the data. For this reason, I also chose to not include the government's comparison of wages between citizens and non-citizens by occupation. However, there are a few indications that these inequalities along lines of nationality go beyond the extreme of low-skilled workers. Tong and Al Awad (2014) examine a subset of workers in the UAE's private sector, contributing to the body of knowledge about labor market stratification by nationality. They find that although jobs in the UAE pay higher wages than in home countries, there is significant cross-national income disparity among skilled workers. For instance, they document that “expatriate managers from OECD countries and Emirati managers are paid way above the levels of managers from other parts of the world. This is also the case for professionals” (Tong and Al Awad 2014:69). This reinforces the centrality of nationality in GCC labor markets, pointing to the need to examine the experiences of disaggregated nationalities (that is to say, to move beyond the overly simplified “native versus expatriate dichotomy”).

Matching Persons to Jobs: A Theoretical Understanding

To approach the question of how employers find workers, and why they decide to use those recruitment methods, I will first review the theoretical understanding of how the demand and supply sides of the labor market are matched – the matching of persons to jobs. While early structuralist research on the supply side of labor markets drew attention to industrial and organizational factors, there remained little focus on employers. Bills, Di Stasio, and Gërkhani (2017) effectively summarize the need to understand employers as agents:

Studying employer hiring behavior allows us to analyze the cues and information on candidates that employers trust and consider relevant, the motives underlying employers' recruitment and screening actions, and how employers' actions vary across organizational and institutional contexts. Compared to approaches that relate individual characteristics to occupational rewards (status attainment research), our focus on employers' agency deals explicitly with the gatekeeping role of employers and the decisions they make about who can—and, equally importantly, who cannot—enter the organization. (P. 63)

In conceptualizing employers as active decisions makers in the matching of persons to jobs, this allows for an understanding of the demand for labor being influenced by the supply of labor, rather than being two distinct and unrelated processes.

Sørensen and Kalleberg (1981) propose an alternative to neoclassical economics' wage competition model, theorizing that the matching process can occur as *vacancy competition*. This is the primary approach used in sociological studies of job/person matching, where employers use personal characteristics instead of the wage rate to measure of an individual's productive capacity. Employers use this information to find the individual who best “fits” the job position. This theory assumes these personal characteristics are visible during the matching process, and includes both achievements (such as educational attainment and work experience) and ascriptive characteristics (these are contextual, but can include sex, and some variation of ethnicity). These characteristics (or measures of “fit”) are an important idea that I will return to. This theory

covers both the supply and demand sides of labor of markets – employers are searching for workers, but job seekers are also searching for jobs.

An expansion of *queuing theory* is integral to this explanation of how persons are matched to jobs. There are two components: *labor queues*, the ordering of potential workers by employers in accordance with the aforementioned characteristics, and *job queues*, workers' rankings of jobs (Reskin and Roos 2009). Using this framework, persons are matched to jobs by matching the labor queue to the job queue: the individual in the highest position in the labor queue is matched with the highest ranked job in the job queue. Regardless of the context, this theoretical framing indicates the need to study the job/person matching process from two distinct perspectives: that of job seekers and employers. Since this study focuses on the employer-perspective, this will be the primary focus of the subsequent literature review.

Searching for the Best “Fit”: Why Ascriptive Characteristics?

While classical economists argue that employers rank job seekers by measures of cost and fit, much research shows that employers use these and other considerations to instead use ascriptive characteristics as a basis for ranking. Employers rely on socially constructed meanings of these ascriptive characteristics to order labor queues, which are not necessarily economically rational. Reskin and Roos (2009:36-7) outline several reasons why labor queues are transformed into those based on an ascriptive characteristic: (1) the force of custom, (2) ascriptive characteristics act as a proxy for fit, especially when it is difficult to measure, (3) employers' concern that “minority” workers (those without the mainstream ascriptive characteristic in the occupation) would disrupt the workforce or face difficult assimilation, (4) employers ignore potential wage savings when labor costs are only a small proportion of overall costs, and (5)

employers seek to maintain ascriptive characteristic-based privileges because of bias. Ascriptive characteristics are socially constructed to take on meanings of fit, but as the reasons above outline, they are not always necessarily indicative of productivity or the minimization of costs. Additionally, rather than productivity in the purely economic sense, employers look for a less precise sense of “fit” for a job. Researchers have demonstrated the transformation of labor queues into one based on an ascriptive characteristic in many contexts, on the basis of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and nativity (Model and Ladipo 1996; Spalter-Roth and Deitch 1999; Reskin and Roos 2009).

Waldinger and Lichter (2003) describe this process particularly clearly, with the ascriptive characteristic of race in US labor markets:

Employers allocate jobs to the “best” workers, but “best” is not only defined in terms of the qualities – aptitude, skill, experience, productivity – that directly impinge on ability to get the job done... In a racialized society like the United States, entire ethnic groups are ranked according to sets of socially meaningful but arbitrary traits; these rankings determine fitness for broad categories of jobs. All other qualifications equal, members of the top-ranked group are picked first when employers decide whom to hire; the rest follow in order of rank. (P.8)

This theoretical ordering of workers by ascriptive characteristic is generalizable to different contexts, to explain otherwise puzzling segmentation in labor markets. However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not yet been a conceptualization of GCC-based employers using nationality to rank job seekers in labor queues. It is important to understand how employers in this context rank job seekers by nationality to understand labor market segmentation with implications for inequality and native unemployment, especially in terms of policy development. For example, knowing how employers rank native job seekers for various jobs, and why, would inform policymaking to move native job seekers up labor queues.

Recruitment as a Subset of Hiring Procedures

With this broad theoretical framework of how job/person matching occurs, next I will review how recruitment methods fit into this broader process. Hiring procedures are the specific ways that the labor market generates labor queues and job queues. Hiring procedures can be conceptualized as an overarching process, composed of *recruitment*, the solicitation of job applicants, and *screening* and *selection*, where the pool is narrowed down from these initial solicitations, resulting in the final hiring of employees (Holzer 1987). As a point of clarification, recruitment is an employer-driven selection of methods or channels through which information about the availability of a job position is transmitted from an employer to a job seeker. This includes specific methods such as recruitment agencies, newspaper job advertisements, and online job portals. With this breakdown of hiring procedures, recruitment is the first step in the generation of labor queues, the job seeker's search process and employer's screening as the generation of job queues, and selection as the process whereby these two queues are matched, through the coordination of the employer's and successful applicant's selection. It is important to clarify the distinctiveness of these concepts because of the tendency for researchers to conflate them in studies of labor markets, especially "hiring" and "recruitment", perhaps because of their interchangeability in everyday conversation. Confusion may arise from the imprecise use of these concepts – for example, "informal hiring" may mean the use of informal recruitment methods for a legal job position in one context (Bridges and Villemez 1986), but refers to hiring procedures for informal sector workers in another (Savasan and Schneider 2006). Although this may be a semantic difference in some cases, the precise identification of "recruitment" as a concept is central to this paper.

The majority of existing sociological literature on hiring procedures focuses on screening and selection, especially through the lens of labor market sorting producing and reproducing inequalities (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Neumark, Bank, and Van Nort 1996; Pager 2003). These studies do not consider any potential inequalities resulting from which job seekers are able to access information about job vacancies in the first place. Researchers usually pay little attention to recruitment methods, despite its key role as the first step in the hiring process. Management and personnel literature do pay attention to the recruitment component of hiring procedures, but often in the form of prescriptive literature, or evaluations of these prescriptions (Carroll et al. 1999; Mathews and Redman 1996; Tanova 2003). The body of literature on hiring procedures needs a particular focus on the employer-side of recruitment because of its involvement in generating labor and job queues, as well as its importance in the job/person matching process more broadly – in order to have applicants, job seekers first need to have this information about open job positions. It is important to study the role of recruitment methods in producing inequalities in the labor force, to then develop policies to correct these inequalities. For instance, Bahrain currently acknowledges that growing native unemployment is an issue of key concern – understanding how and why employers rank Bahraini job seekers is necessary to address how to make changes on the demand and supply sides of labor markets to increase native employment.

What is the Role of Recruitment Methods?

In the most basic sense, recruitment methods convey information about open job positions from employers to job seekers. However, there are important issues to consider about how employers select one recruitment method over another, and why. Neoclassical economists

argue that employers select the recruitment method that returns the highest economic profit (Gorter and Van Ommeren 1999), while sociological approaches situate this cost-benefit analysis of employers within larger social contexts. A few studies have examined how dimensions of these social contexts influence employers' choice of recruitment method, including occupation, industry, organization size, labor market economic conditions, (Russo et al. 2000; Marsden and Gorman 2001; Gërkhani and Koster 2015). A particularly significant portion of this literature is devoted to the role of social contacts and networks in recruitment.

As reviewed above, employers often rely on socially constructed meanings of these ascriptive characteristics to order labor queues, yet this ranking by ascriptive characteristics has not been factored into analyses of recruitment methods. If employers are measuring a job seeker's potential fit by some ascriptive characteristic X, is it not also possible that employers would orient their recruitment methods towards seeking out job seekers with ascriptive characteristic X? Although several studies find that various recruitment methods are more or less effective when it comes to finding "suitable", "good quality" or "productive" workers, but these often remain tied to vague skills or qualifications. To the best of my knowledge, there are no existing studies revealing employers' choice of recruitment method to target workers at the top of their labor queue, possessing some ascriptive characteristic. A cross-occupational analysis would best reveal this variation in recruitment method, which largely has not been attempted by existing studies. This is an important contribution to this body of literature because it has the potential to reveal an additional source of labor force stratification resulting from the hiring process, aside from employer biases in screening and selection. This knowledge would then have key implications for developing ameliorative policies.

Ethnic Enclaves

One concept to explain the concentration workers of a specific ethnic identity in a part of the labor market is ethnic enclaves. This concept has particularly emerged in research focusing on the US. Wilson and Portes (1980) define an ethnic enclave as a concentration of employers with a significant proportion of employees belonging to a particular ethnicity within some geographic area (and are also fundamentally tied to immigrant groups). As Portes and Jensen (1989) note, this sociological definition of ethnic enclaves should be determined by the labor market, rather than residential patterns (they argue that operationalization by the latter can lead to serious errors). In this endeavor to understand the role of nationality in labor markets, literature on ethnic enclaves provides a tangential concept, including the mechanisms of workforce stratification. Existing research finds that entrepreneurship plays a particularly important role in ethnic enclaves, providing economic opportunity and upward mobility (Portes and Jensen 1989). Wilson and Portes (1980) suggest that new immigrants do not simply join the secondary sector (of dual market theory), but indicate the importance of distinct ethnic enclave labor economies:

Immigrant entrepreneurs make use of language and cultural barriers and of ethnic affinities to gain privileged access to markets and sources of labor. These conditions might give them an edge over similar peripheral firms in the open economy. The necessary counterpart to these ethnic ties of solidarity is the principle of ethnic preference in hiring and of support of other immigrants in their economic ventures. (P.315)

Importantly, this labor market structure assumes that employers and employees share cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities, which employers capitalize on to capture low-wage labor. Employers use the ascriptive characteristic of ethnicity (especially as it relates to immigrant status) as the primary means of finding workers. Although the concept of ethnic enclaves assumes that employers and employees share ethnic group affiliation, it still is relevant to this

study because of employers' use of ethnicity as a means of sorting job seekers in the hiring process.

Notably, research suggests that employers in ethnic enclaves use recruitment methods that convey information about open job positions solely to in-group members. Bailey and Waldinger (1991) argue that the importance of social networks in ethnic enclaves shapes the hiring process, including employers' reliance on recruitment methods such as word-of-mouth information flows. They suggest that network hiring reduces uncertainty about the potential worker, since they are a part of the employer's extended social network. While the GCC context does not assume shared ethnic identity between the employer and employee, literature on ethnic enclaves substantiates the idea of employers ranking potential job seekers by an ethnicity-based characteristic, and the association of recruitment methods with targeting those job seekers with a high ranking in labor queues.

Nationality and Recruitment in the GCC Context

Next, I will review relevant literature in the empirical context of the GCC to support the importance of nationality in the job/person matching process. Existing literature and widespread discourse clearly show that nationality is one of the most fundamental issues in GCC labor markets, perhaps most clearly shown through the degree of labor migration to the region. Yet these very processes that are taken for granted by numerous researchers are poorly documented, demonstrating the need for research on exactly how employers hire.

Following the theoretical framing from the previous section, in the GCC context there is an incomplete picture of how the process of matching jobs and persons works. I break this matching process down into two broad questions pertaining to GCC labor markets: (1) How do

job seekers search for jobs? (2) How do employers search workers? In addressing these two questions, existing literature will show that nationality is the framing lens. Although this paper empirically focuses on the employer (or demand) perspective, I also review how job seekers find jobs because this search is fundamentally connected to employers' search process. They do not always line up, but reviewing this information allows us to triangulate existing limited knowledge to best understand how employers find workers. In this section I show that there are significant gaps in the literature about how the job/person matching process operates for both native and expatriate workers, both from the perspective of job seekers and employers. It is important to fill these gaps because of its implications for the native-expatriate worker balance. As previously discussed, GCC governments are particularly concerned with correcting rising native unemployment, and yet implement policies without comprehensively understanding how and why native unemployment is rising. The findings of how the job/person matching process works in the GCC context directly informs policy making, by understanding why employers recruit expatriate workers over native ones, and where in the employment process to introduce policy interventions. In addition to this broader importance of these gaps in the literature, it is also of interest to address them to develop understandings of tangential sociological concepts, such as brokerage and recruitment channels.

This first question, how do job seekers find jobs in GCC labor markets, can be further subdivided by the job seekers' nationality, given the differing nationality-specific mechanisms implied by existing literature. There is little information about how natives find jobs in these contexts. One recruitment method that has been discussed in a limited capacity is the idea of

nepotism, or *wasta*⁴. Khuri (1980) describes the lack of lack of formal recruitment procedures in Bahrain, resulting in the reliance on personal contacts for natives to secure employment.

Building on this apparent centrality of nepotism, Cunningham and Sarayrah (1994) describe that nepotism through family ties was formerly the primary mode of connecting individuals to the economy, but has evolved to include friends and acquaintances. Barnett, Yandle and Naufal (2013:2) argue that this use of nepotism is common in the job search process of native job seekers, bluntly stating, “Those with *wasta* get job interviews and jobs, while those who do not suffer through calls that are not returned and letters that go unanswered”. While multiple papers argue for the dominance of nepotism in native job seekers’ hunt, there has not been a comparative study of job search processes by native job seekers. Existing literature certainly indicates that nepotism is a significant method in helping native job seekers find jobs, but there is no detailed understanding of how this works, nor is there any indication of the possible existence of other methods. Importantly, existing studies often do not specify what types of workers and occupations this applies to, so variation in the use of nepotism by job type is unknown.

Moreover, with the emergence of a new set of workforce nationalization policies in Bahrain as of 2008, there is no up-to-date understanding of the role of nepotism in job seekers’ search process. Taken together with the overarching lack of knowledge about the job search process for natives, this is a gaping hole in the literature, especially given the otherwise prominent governmental attention to correcting this imbalance of native employment in public and private sectors. This

⁴ *Wasta* has many similarities to the idea of job seekers using social ties to find jobs. This is a topic that has received relatively more attention in Western contexts, yet interestingly no GCC-specific papers situate *wasta* among the broader set of literature on the role of social contacts in hiring.

review of how native job seekers find jobs indicates the expectation that employers similarly rely on nepotism to find native workers.

The literature situation is slightly less dire when it comes to the question of how expatriate workers find jobs in GCC labor markets, but is still far from adequate. One emerging focus related to this question is expatriate job seekers' use of migrant brokers, who mediate the matching of job seekers in sending countries to jobs in receiving countries. Migrant brokers are often seen as a third perspective, in contrast to that of employers and job seekers, but are included in this section since the majority of literature looks at the relationship between migrant brokers and job seekers more than that between migrant brokers and employers. This is a somewhat more complex set of literature to integrate into the GCC context, because these studies often primarily focus on the sending country, and encompass migration to a variety of receiving countries that may include but are not restricted to those in the GCC. A few papers do discuss specific migration streams to the GCC. This set of literature is further complicated by the wide variety of brokerage forms that fall under the general definition of migrant brokerage. Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh (2012) describe the breadth of migrant brokers, varying in structure (individuals versus agencies), formality (formal versus informal), scale (ranging from part-time or single operations, all the way up to large scale brokerage), governmental regulation, and fee structures. Additionally some brokers position themselves between individuals and recruitment agencies, adding further complexity.

With this range of brokerage types, I will review several relevant studies that explicitly address the use of migrant brokers to facilitate the movement of migrants to GCC countries. Rahman (2011) integrates understandings of recruitment agencies and migrant networks to understand the labor migration of low-skilled workers from Bangladesh to the UAE and Qatar.

He describes recruitment occurring through migrant networks and private recruiting agencies (used by 58% and 42% of job seekers, respectively). With the use of private recruiting agencies, the author describes a several month-long process of recruitment:

A recruiting agency in a Gulf country places a demand letter to their counterpart in Bangladesh, asking for a certain number of migrants for certain occupations. A recruiting agency in Bangladesh approaches the BMET for initial clearance. Once the agency receives the clearance, it searches out prospective migrants. (P. 11)

This implies that employers are in contact with recruiting agency representatives in the GCC in order to find these expatriate workers, but the specific details of this interaction are not provided – from the employer perspective, it remains in the abstract. This paper describes fees charged to prospective migrants, but not the cost structure for employers. Fernandez (2014) also describes these two processes, migrant networks and recruitment agencies in Ethiopia, in the recruitment of Ethiopian women as domestic workers. She also discusses the use of Ethiopia-based illegal brokers, who are either individual operators or legally registered companies. She further elaborates on the recruitment processes, describing how intermediaries in all three cases then connect migrants with another set of recruitment agencies located in the Middle East.

These studies, which paint a similar picture to other research about how expatriate workers find jobs in GCC countries, indicate that migrant brokers, in their various forms, should be a dominant method, especially for low-skilled labor from low income countries. These two studies exemplify three significant gaps in the literature of expatriate worker recruitment, where there is little information about: (1) the employer side of migrant broker usage, (2) the recruitment of high skilled workers, and (3) the recruitment of workers from higher income countries. The framing of expatriate recruitment in terms of worker vulnerability means that the current state of literature misses out on significant portions of the expatriate worker population in

GCC countries. It is important to fill these gaps in the literature, since they pertain to significant portions of the workforce in GCC countries.

The fragmented and incomplete literature on how job seekers find jobs in GCC labor markets partially informs my second question, “How do employers find workers?”. Since these are two sides of the same coin, I expect some degree of overlap between the literature focusing on workers and on employers. This process is bifurcated by nationality, in terms of natives and expatriates. Extrapolating from this previous literature, I expect employers to find native workers through some form of social contacts or nepotism, and to find expatriate workers through the use of social contacts and recruitment agencies (both in GCC countries and sending countries).

Unsurprisingly, there is little information about how employers find workers in GCC countries. A few studies superficially describe recruitment from the perspective of employers in this context, speaking to the body of human resources literature. Al-Horr and Salih (2011) surveyed human resources managers in Qatar, providing descriptive statistics of their recruitment methods. The researchers do not indicate which industries are represented, or what job positions are being covered. They find that recruiting efforts primarily target native job seekers, followed by expatriates from developed countries, then Arab expatriates, and lastly non-Arab expatriates. It is unclear how the researchers define the terms “Arab” and “non-Arab”, as well as “developed countries” The researchers also report that natives and expatriates use different job search methods, which poses major methodological and theoretical issues since it infers data about job seekers from employers. Additionally, this paper highlights the need to understand the meaning-making, social processes, and understandings of recruitment, all of which surveys and other quantitative methodologies are poorly suited for. Despite the significant issues with this paper, it points towards the meaningful intersection of workers’ nationality and recruitment methods in

the GCC context. Al Ariss and Guo (2016) also describe the sorting process by nationality, through interviews with managers in the UAE (although it is unclear which industries). Their find,

The impact of cultural/nationality-based stereotypes on job allocations was evident in our interviews. Our interview data showed that job allocations were done based on the matching of what is understood to be the requisite characteristics of an ideal job candidate and cultural biases or nationality-based stereotypes associated with international employees' countries of origin. Emirati participants mentioned that international employees from a particular country were selected based on the stereotypes of the comparative advantage of the job candidates' home country in a certain industry or specialization. (P. 582)

Although this again points towards the centrality of nationality in the hiring process, the researchers conflate recruitment with selection. From their analysis, it is unclear whether employers conduct "open" recruitment resulting in a diverse set of applicants that they then filter using stereotypes, or whether recruitment itself plays a role in this sorting process. This is an important distinction that advances our knowledge of how labor market sorting occurs in GCC countries.

This review of existing literature can be summarized as pointing out several gaps in the literature, which this study will address. Firstly, there is little research about recruitment as a social process, GCC labor markets, and, combined, recruitment in GCC labor markets. It is important to study this as a source of workforce stratification and downstream inequalities, resulting from the labor market. Additional flaws in existing literature are that they focus on expatriate workers who are low skilled and from low-income countries, meaning that all other groups of workers remain mystified. It is important to address these other types of workers to have a more comprehensive understanding of the current workforce, in order to develop policies addressing issues such as rising native unemployment. It is evident that nationality plays a key role in the sorting of workers, but it is unknown how it affects employers' choice of recruitment

method. Similarly, this is an important gap to understand in addressing the simultaneous rising native employment and expatriate labor reliance. Put together, there is no complete picture of how employers find workers in the GCC context, especially in terms of the underlying implied role of nationality. How employers search for workers, and the role of nationality in this, remains a puzzle. This is also important for developing nuanced understandings of nationality as a concept with socially constructed meanings, especially in relation to labor markets.

One last important issue to review in this section is the use of “nationality” as the key concept for analysis. As outlined in this section, existing research in this field primarily relies on the concept of “nationality” rather than “ethnicity” – this is likely due to the political and legal formality and consequences of “nationality”, especially when it comes to international labor migration. To speak to existing literature, I follow in this tradition of primarily using “nationality”. However, it is necessary to add complexity to this issue in considering the intersection of nationality with ethnicity and country of training. Existing studies do not consider these tangential factors that employers may attach meanings to – however, it is important to do so to gain a more nuanced understanding of these highly diverse and international workforces.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Case Selection

I analyze how employers search for workers in Bahrain’s healthcare industry, and how they decide which recruitment methods to use. As previously outlined, GCC labor markets are a highly unique and understudied area, emphasizing the need for exploratory and descriptive research to establish how job/person matching works from the employer perspective. Despite the similarity in social and political environments across GCC countries, focusing on one particular

country, Bahrain, allows for an analysis of how employers make recruitment decisions in a single sociopolitical context, especially given variations in the precise details and timeframes of government policies from one country to another. In addition to selecting one specific national context, I also focus on one particular industry, healthcare. This methodological decision again goes back to the severely understudied nature of GCC labor markets – understanding one smaller part of the picture in detail lays the groundwork for future research to comprehend labor markets in this region more broadly. Bahrain’s healthcare industry provides an ideal opportunity to study recruitment and its implications for stratification for several theoretical reasons.

Firstly, employers in this specific industry need workers for a range of job positions, which provides variation in worker skill level. For example, a single employer hires workers to fill positions spanning management, doctors, nurses, technicians, administrative staff, and maintenance staff. The majority of hiring studies focus on specific types of jobs – commonly low-wage, low-skill, entry-level, or elite jobs. However, examining the individual employers in this industry allows for an understanding of how a single employer makes recruitment decisions across different jobs in the organization. This is a key contribution of this study, since few studies explicitly address hiring for different job types of varying skill levels. Secondly, organizations in Bahrain’s healthcare industry rely on both native and expatriate labor, allowing for an analysis of the role of nationality in recruitment that reflects the broader demographics of the country. Several other industries, such as finance, can be skewed towards one group over the other. Additionally, this allows us to examine how employers make decisions about recruitment when they have an incredibly broad range of possible workers, on a global scale. This provides a unique opportunity to study recruitment in a transnational context. Thirdly, several industries in the GCC region have recently come under significant scrutiny because of worker abuse –

especially the construction industry. The potential for employers' unwillingness to participate is further heightened increases in labor regulation in recent years, including the establishment of a formal organization, the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), in Bahrain. As an industry, healthcare has received comparatively less scrutiny in terms of labor practices, which may mean that employers in this industry are more willing to discuss the potentially sensitive topic of finding workers in an honest manner. Lastly, my personal contacts in Bahrain more broadly, as well as the healthcare industry more specifically, facilitates participant recruitment.

Methodology

To investigate how employers find workers in Bahrain's healthcare industry, I conducted 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with employers. Since I am examining decision-making and social processes, in-depth interviews capture this data particularly well. The nature of this study is exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative, meaning that I am not seeking statistical generalizability. However, this study does provide a detailed exploration of recruitment in a particular GCC healthcare industry, which lays the groundwork for how this dimension of hiring procedures operates, as well as its implications for labor market stratification by nationality. The broad themes and findings from this study may be applicable to other contexts in this region through logical generalizability (Luker 2010).

I define "employers" on two levels: (1) individuals who make high-level decisions about hiring procedures, including CEOs and owners of organizations in the healthcare industry, and (2) individuals who enforce the decisions about hiring made by those in positions of greater authority, although they may also have some degree of autonomy, which includes human resources personnel. Based on this operationalization, the inclusion criterion for the study is

involvement in the recruitment of an employee in the healthcare industry in Bahrain. I recruited participants through convenience sampling of personal contacts, as well as snowball sampling. Zahra (2011) highlights the importance (and often necessity) of relying on personal contacts to conduct research in this regional context, with widespread difficulties in gathering data otherwise. I faced several obstacles in gathering data, with interviewees being unwilling and/or unable to answer some questions (for example, providing the breakdown of numbers of workers in different job positions by nationality). Interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes, taking place at a time of the participant's choosing, and occurred remotely, via telephone and Skype calls. The interviews included gaining verbal consent. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed, which including anonymizing them by modifying all identifying information, including names, organization names, and distinctive organization specialties. Research suggests that telephone interviews do not yield alternative results to face-to-face interviews (Sturges and Harahan 2004), and may also be economically advantageous to gather data from geographically dispersed participants, and prompt interviewees to be more candid with sensitive topics (Opdenakker 2006). Following this logic, all of the interviews were audio-only. Moreover, remote, non-visual interviews may be advantageous in this particular context to avoid potential cross-cultural and gender effects between the interviewer and interviewee. However, it is still possible that my identity as a foreign, Western-educated female may have primed the respondents, especially in terms of emphasizing legal recruitment methods (over illegal pathways to employment) as well as recruitment from Western contexts.

To analyze the data, I went through multiple rounds of coding, starting with inductive coding where I coded any mention of employers ranking job seekers' characteristics, as well as decisions about recruitment methods. I was originally guided with the single research question,

“How do employers find workers?” and did not intend to focus on nationality in the recruitment process. However, through the interviewing and coding processes, it soon became evident that employers primarily relied on nationality as an initial means of ranking potential workers. I then developed secondary codes addressing: (1) how employers rank potential workers by nationality, (2) how these rankings vary by job position, (3) employers’ rationales for these rankings, and (4) how employers’ choice of recruitment method related to these rankings.

Table 2. Summary of Respondents’ Characteristics.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Sex	
Male	8
Female	2
Nationality	
Bahraini	6
Indian	1
Lebanese	1
Pakistani	1
Yemeni	1
Job Position	
Human Resources Manager	6
Business Director	1
Chief Executive Officer	1
Head of Human Resources	1
Medical Director	1
Time in Job Position	
0-2 years	4
2-4 years	3
4-6 years	1
6-8 years	1
8+ years	1
Organization Type	
Hospital	6
Medical Center	2
Hospital Network	1
Diagnostics/Research Center	1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nationality is highly salient to employers in their hiring decisions, notably their choice of recruitment method. Employers have an image of an ideal worker identity for a given job position, and this identity is a social construction of a nationality. Facing a complex job/person matching process operating on both a domestic and global scale, employers use this ascriptive characteristic not only as a proxy for fit, but also for worker supply.

Nationalities are socially constructed as worker identities, representing pools of job seekers who are both seemingly a good fit, and in adequate supply. It is these two components that make nationalities then seem “naturally” suited for specific jobs. For example, I find that many employers have the notion that Indian citizens are likely to possess a strong educational background and relevant work experience as doctors, and are also eager to work in Bahrain. These notions re-construct the meaning of being Indian for employers: rather than representing the actual variation of the population, employers in Bahrain see Indian citizens as potential ideal doctors. This is not the only worker identity constructed around Indian citizens, nor is it an accurate representation of the actual pool of Indian job seekers, but employers come to believe this as a fact.

Employers’ decisions about recruitment processes is a site where employers can use these constructed worker identities to target specific job seekers by nationality, through their choice of recruitment method. However, recruitment is also a site where employers learn about the labor-related meanings of nationalities. Nationalities are used both to guide employers’ recruitment decisions, but recruitment also re-constructs nationalities as worker identities.

Nationality as a Proxy for Fit

For employers in Bahrain's healthcare industry, the ascriptive characteristic of nationality is used as a primary proxy for a job seeker's "fit" for a given job position. The process of identifying a job vacancy is firstly understood as the need to look for a particular worker identity that manifests as a nationality, which represents some measure of fit. As per a theoretical understanding, "fit" not only refers to a worker's ability to do a job efficiently, through hard and soft skills, education, and prior experience, but can also manifest through minimizing economic costs to employers. Employers understand nationalities as social constructions of worker identities, each of which represents different dimensions of fit (some combination of hard skills, soft skills, and/or economic cost). Moreover, a single nationality can be socially constructed in multiple ways, to represent several different worker identities of fit, depending on the job position. This finding provides support for Reskin and Roos' (2009) assertion that labor queues can be transformed into those based on an ascriptive characteristic because of its ability to act as a proxy for fit. Below, I provide in-depth descriptions of how employers use nationality as a proxy for fit for four distinct job types in the healthcare industry.

On one end of the spectrum are the most skilled and specialized jobs, where employers used nationality as a measure of caliber of education and training. These positions were primarily for doctors with specific medical and research area specializations. Ali, the medical director of a hospital, described this process for specialized doctors, especially in terms of the relatively hard skills inferred by nationality:

The decision of what country to go to depends on the specialty that I am getting, and the business that I am going to do. For example, if I'm going to do plastic surgery. So I would prefer to bring someone from a European country in order – because I know they are more advanced in that field, so I will bring someone from those countries. And also, because the experience tells that. Experience in different specialties varies by the region of the world. Let me tell you an example. For example, if I need to get a physiotherapist,

a doctor who specialized in physiotherapy, then the previously called Soviet countries – like Ukraine, Romania, Czechoslovakia – they are very specialized in that field. So I would rather go to them to recruit that specialty. So it depends on the specialty, and where they give the best service and education and training in that specialty, then I approach them... Suppose if I am going to do some transplant surgery. I know that in the United States they are very much advanced in transplants, so I would approach the United States, and find out somebody from there.

Ali explained regional and national variations in various measures of fit, particularly the caliber of education, training, and experience in various medical specializations, providing examples from several Western countries and regions. Ahmed, the head of human resources for the Bahrain branch of a GCC-wide medical group, also described this use of nationality as a proxy for expertise and training in medical specializations: “We look to the UK for many specialty doctors, like cardiology – this is where we are finding doctors with good expertise, good training”.

Ali went on to explain the sources of his knowledge substantiating the use of nationality as a proxy for these various dimensions of fit, using the specific example of turning to Eastern European countries to search for doctors specializing in physiotherapy:

I mean, it’s well known. I mean, it’s in the news, it’s in the internet. Because you can see that they have many treatment centers for rehabilitation, physiotherapy centers in those countries. They do a lot of ads about their services around the world, so you would know that.

He further explained these sources of knowledge with another example:

And if you want, for example, an eye surgeon. We know that, from our past experience and from the news, that in certain parts of Spain they are very specialized in eye surgery, so we go and approach them. So there are countries where it is well known among professional people that they are specialized in a certain field.

Ali’s explanations of using nationality as a proxy for hard skills rely on seemingly widespread industry-specific knowledge about human capital investment in these areas. He also hints at path dependency as a reason for maintaining these associations between nationality and job positions.

This description of using nationality as a proxy for medical specialization skills, whether formal or de facto, reflect existing scholarship on inter-country variations in medical specializations (Döhler 1992). When prompted about medical specializations in non-Western countries, Ali described:

Countries like India and the Philippines, they have expertise – good training, good education, good experience. If I'm going to get someone who's a general practitioner, okay, with long experience in dealing with patients. For that, I go to India and Philippines, and recruit someone from there. I would not go to these Western countries for a GP, it does not make sense when I can find a good worker from another country for less money.

Interestingly, doctors from non-Western countries are epitomized not only by their hard skill-based measures of fit, but also by their cost. In this sense, doctors from Asia (primarily India and the Philippines, according to all the interviewees) are a good fit for these job positions not only in terms of their on-the-job performance, but also in terms of minimizing wage costs to the organization. Ahmed described how wage minimization is not a factor for recruitment from Western countries: “When we are talking about Europe, America, we are always only bringing doctors. We have the big budget for them only, not for all these other doctors”.

Other interviewees also described the role of language skills in measures of fit, and how these varied by nationality. Hamza, the CEO of a medical center, described factoring soft skills into notions of fit for general practitioners:

We tend to want doctor from India because we – most of our client are Indian, and the Indian doctor is good, especially for the language. They can communicate in any language with the client – patient. More than 70% of our doctor are Indian because of this.

Hamza also described the role of language skills for nurses:

It is very important that you hire the nurse with Bahraini experience because they are in direct contact with the patient... It helps with the language if they know a little bit of Arabic, because if you take from India they will not know any word in Arabic. Another

thing is they will be familiar with the equipment and materials and disposables, which are purchased locally.

Hamza exposed an apparent contradiction – he looks for Indian doctors for their Indian language abilities, and nurses for their Arabic language abilities, yet both job positions require extensive patient contact. When probed about this issue, he responded:

I understand what you mean, but we have a mixed population, so I wouldn't hire a nurse from Indian unless she has a specialty. I wouldn't put her in the general service without this dual language ability. For the nurse, a little Arabic is a must. But for the doctor, it is okay because then the nurse can tell the translation if we need. For doctor, most important is they are good doctor with medical skills.

Employers rank language skills more highly for nurses than for doctors – fit is more a matter of technical medical skills for doctors, while for nurses it is both technical expertise as well as patient communication in the context of an ethnically- and linguistically-diverse patient population.

In the case of the least skilled job position in this study, administrative staff, employers described relatively minimal hard skills, placing a larger emphasis on soft skills. Mohammed, the business director of a diagnostics and research center, described the requirements for these job positions:

Basically we are after fresh graduates with a degree in management or finance or IT. Because it's usually simple administrative work which needs to operate a computer and stuff like that. And a minimum maturity level, minimal organizational skills, a peaceful attitude, patience, They have to deal with patients when they come to pay for the tests, et cetera.

Mohammed's description, which echoed that of other interviewees, is that fit for administrative positions requires a basic educational qualification with no prior experience, but various personality-centric soft skills. Again, measures of fit for administrative staff positions included economic cost, but in an interesting manner that differed to other job positions:

There is a system whereby there's an agency in the government which helps support the recruitment of fresh graduates by paying maybe 60-70% of the salaries of the new recruits. So instead of hiring someone for 600 dinars for example, a graduate, if I were to recruit those graduates, the government would pay 400 and I would pay 200 only.

In the case of administrative staff, governmental policies aiming to nationalize the workforce in effect lower the economic cost of hiring Bahraini job seekers. So, workers with the ascriptive characteristic of Bahraini nationality are seen by employers to not only have minimal educational qualifications, but more importantly are a good fit for administrative staff positions because of their comparatively low cost.

Nationality as a Proxy for Worker Supply

While I find support for the theoretical expectation that employers use the ascriptive characteristic of nationality as a proxy for fit, I also unexpectedly find a second proxy role of nationality: for the supply of workers. The interview data shows that employers are highly cognizant of which countries have sufficiently large job seeker pools to fill their vacancies. Nationalities are not only constructed as worker identities in terms of their abilities to perform a given job, but also in terms of providing an adequate supply to workers to meet employer needs. I find that demand for labor does not exist in isolation from the supply of labor; rather, demand is a product of supply in Bahrain's healthcare industry. Employers face the structural obstacle of a lacking supply of specialized workers domestically, and adapt to this with the social construction of nationalities as worker identities, acting a proxy for worker supply. These constructed worker identities not only represent which nationalities are likely to have the right skills to do the job, but also which nationalities are likely to have many workers who are willing and able to apply for and accept a job with them. Although it may seem like this finding is inferring information about job seekers from employers (that is to say, gathering data from the wrong source), this

section instead aims to develop an understanding of how employers interpret cues about the supply of workers. Below, I provide descriptions of how employers use nationality as a proxy for worker supply, using interview data reflecting on their first time looking for workers for various positions.

The most prevalent theme of using nationality as a proxy for worker supply is the lack of Bahraini job seekers for most specialized jobs, which supports existing literature. As Mohammed described, “they are not available in the Bahraini market in general, so we have to fish for them internationally”. Mariam, a human resources manager for a hospital, added, “Bahrain is a small country. Specializations are rare, and then also population is small. So where will you find Bahraini workers for these special jobs?” Employers are evidently aware of the lack of Bahraini job seekers for many jobs requiring highly and moderately specialized skills.

However, in addition to finding workers with the right skills, employers were also keenly aware of workers’ willingness to apply for and accept these job positions, even if they are otherwise qualified to do so by measures of fit. Insufficient wages emerged as the key reason for this. Ali described his understanding of workers’ unwillingness to work in his hospital for this reason:

For local Bahraini we actually do not look specifically. The process is completely different from an expat in which most of them are consultant doctors who come on a consultant basis. So they come and they share with us the revenue... They are not full-time because they are working – they are working in the Ministry [of Health] and they cannot afford to lose a government job for private practice. Definitely money is much lower in private practice.

In the case of doctors, both general practitioners and those with medical specializations, low wages in the private sector (as compared to the public sector) make workers unwilling to seek positions with the employers I spoke to. This finding is in line with previous research on employment in the public and private sectors in GCC countries (Kapiszewski 2006). Employers

approximate the availability of workers who are either qualified and/or willing to work in the healthcare industry through nationality.

The social construction of non-Bahraini nationalities as being plentiful in the supply of workers was another common theme, although often difficult to separate from employers' notions of fit. All the interviewees described the knowledge of which countries have a large supply of workers for specific positions as a matter of fact. Ali described this seemingly common knowledge:

I go to those countries where ample of doctors are available and are – either they would like to find opportunities to go out and work – they don't have job in their own country. Like for India, everyone knows that so many doctors are there who want to come to the Gulf for work.

Anjali, a human resources manager for a hospital echoed Ali's beliefs about the supply of doctors in India: "Actually there is a lot of doctors in India who don't get good pay and think the Gulf has good scope. So because of that, we get them from there." Tariq, a human resources manager for a medical center, added the role of gathering and using information from other employers: "The CEO, his friend another CEO told him that it is easy to find nurses in Philippines. Of course, everyone knows that." While not as clear as in the case of Bahraini workers, employers hold strong notions of where to find large supplies of workers for various jobs, which further strengthens their belief in nationalities representing worker identities. Tariq's description suggests a reliance on inter-employer mimetic isomorphism when it comes to making these decisions. While this does not clearly indicate the original source of the connection between nationality and worker/job fit for this employer, it does point towards the role of mimetic isomorphism in maintaining these constructed worker identities.

Recruitment Methods: Targeting Nationalities as Worker Identities

With these findings that nationality acts as a proxy to measure both fit and worker supply, next I situate these within the process of recruitment methods. I find that recruitment methods are a process where employers can (1) target those nationalities that they believe are the “best fit” and in adequate supply, and (2) in some cases, learn which nationalities have workers who are the best fit for the job, and in adequate supply. Therefore, the recruitment process – where employers search for workers – has a dual function: it is a process where employers make recruitment decisions using existing constructions of nationalities as worker identities, and can also socially construct nationalities as worker identities.

Perhaps most interestingly, when prompted about how they decide which recruitment method to use, many employers described how individual recruitment methods often target specific nationalities. Therefore, an employer’s choice of recruitment method is determined by the nationality they are seeking. Hamza’s description of how he goes about choosing a recruitment method to find doctors captures this idea particularly well:

It depends from which country. If I want a European doctor, then I’ll go to the social media – which is the LinkedIn, I’ll put my ad there. Or in the Google ad, I’ll put an ad in my website. But if I need a doctor from East countries, I’ll go straight to a recruitment agency – it’s mostly Indian and Philippines, because these are – and sometimes we go to Pakistan, Bangladesh. But mostly we go to India and the Philippines.

According to Hamza, picking a recruitment method depends entirely on what nationality of worker he is searching for (and as previously described, the nationality of worker he looks for depends on his perception of which nationality is the best fit, and available for a given job position). Ahmed concurred that LinkedIn works particularly well for Western doctors, but also added the effectiveness of placing advertisements in medical journals:

Yeah LinkedIn is also one of the best ways of getting candidates. We are regularly updating our website, plus we are putting the advertisement in LinkedIn, you know. This

is also one of the biggest source for Westerners... But I believe medical journals are the most popular one. Where your target is going directly – you are targeting the doctors who are regularly using the journals. This is the most popular one for us... For example, one journal in the UK. This is - one of them is very famous. So almost all the physicians are reading it. So we'll place it there and get the UK doctors.

Every interviewee who mentioned looking for doctors from Western countries described using some form of online advertisement or a medical journal to target these job seekers.

All employers described looking for workers from Asia (most frequently, India and the Philippines) using recruitment agencies based in those countries. Notably, no employers reported using recruitment agencies to find doctors in Western countries. Mariam described how she decided to use recruitment agencies based in India:

Okay so last year I was looking for three doctors. I knew I wanted the Indians, and to find them I look for the good recruitment agencies there, well established. So I knew to use recruitment agencies because how else to find Indian doctors? In my opinion, using LinkedIn is not good for India. That is what I think – I don't know actually. The recruitment agencies, they – they know the country, where to find the good doctors, good qualifications, so I use that.

She demonstrates the process through which her choice of recruitment method, using recruitment agencies, is entirely guided by the specific nationality-based worker identity she is looking for.

The social construction of the Indian worker identity as ideal doctors determines her recruitment method decision. Similarly, Tariq described his use of recruitment agencies to find nurses in the Philippines:

Like I said, everyone knows for nurses, you go to Philippines. So we asked [other employers] for a recommendation for an agency in that country specifically, and we got one... See, I don't need to sit and think 'how to find workers?' Everyone already knows what nationality they want for what job, so you pick which way will find you workers from that country. Simple.

Tariq's description, relying on the idea that "everyone knows", again goes back to this prevalent idea of an industry-wide reliance on the status quo, which reinforces the relationship between nationalities and worker identities.

Mohammed described turning to his employees' social contacts to fill vacant administrative staff positions at his center:

We prefer to recruit people who can work together, and who are Bahraini, 100%. So I have a senior person here, a Bahraini, who has been with the center for the past six years, and every time I need to recruit someone who is going to work with her, I ask her to look at her social connections to see who would fit to work with her. She usually brings two or three CVs, we interview the candidates, and we do all our own selection. But she brings the CVs first, and she happens to be someone who is sociable, reliable, and mature. And we have two experiences with her like that, and both experiences were successful... I know she'll always bring Bahrainis, because that's who her social connections are.

Despite using a different recruitment method, social contacts, it still manifests itself as a way of targeting a specific nationality. Again, we see that nationality determines the employer's choice of recruitment method.

Non-Employer-Driven Recruitment: Learning About Nationalities through the Recruitment Process

While the analysis above shows that employers can select recruitment methods to intentionally target workers of specific nationalities, I also find that the recruitment process itself can inform employers about the worker identities associated with nationalities. Employers come to understand nationalities as worker identities of the non-representative pools of job seekers they are exposed to through the recruitment process. Most notably, this occurs when the recruitment is not driven by the employer themselves, but by job seekers or an intermediary. In this sense, employers have direct knowledge of the worker supply prior to even having a job vacancy,

One way that recruitment constructs nationalities as worker identities is through unsolicited job applications by job seekers. Ahmed described how he learned that many adequately qualified technicians are Bahraini, by receiving unsolicited job applications:

For junior level positions, we recruit locally. And most of them, they come directly through the personnel department. I mean if they are of Bahraini origin, they have studied [the specialization] in the [specialization] school in Jordan, or the [specialization] school in Kuwait, when they come back to Bahrain, we are the only [specialization] center in the country. So they come and bring their CV to us.

By receiving these unsolicited job applications, Mohammed learned that there are many Bahraini workers who have the right skills to fill a particular technician role at his center. Through this job seeker-driven search process, Mohammed learned to socially construct the Bahraini nationality as a worker identity – he has come to believe that Bahrainis are “good” technicians for his center’s particular specialization.

Similarly, Ahmed recalled learning about the large-scale availability of qualified nurses from the Philippines, through unsolicited contact from a Philippines-based recruitment agency.

He described:

So many agencies come and contact us. We check their references, where they have already supplied manpower. First we are checking all of the references for other employers, then do one trial. If it is good, we use the agency again and again. If not, we do the same with another agency.

Ahmed described this process working to construct his understanding of various nationalities as ideal candidates for positions as nurses: “Philippines, China also – two times I went there – and then India, Pakistan, Egypt, Syria before, not now of course, Jordan. All good for nurses, I would recommend these ones.” Through unsolicited contact from an intermediary in the recruitment process, employers are exposed to non-representative samples of workers from various countries that come to embody who that nationality is. The recruitment process can socially construct nationalities as the non-representative samples of the population that are visible to employers.

“Nationality”, “Ethnicity”, or “Country of Training”?

As previously discussed, existing studies fail to differentiate between these often closely-related concepts in their studies of GCC labor markets. Only one employer provided an example of the intertwined nature of these concepts, indicating that “nationality” is not the only means of differentiating workers. Ahmed described an instance of searching for a specialized researcher:

He is of Arab origin, he is from Jordan-Canadian, and he has got two board certifications, and he happened to be searching for a job in the area because he has a Canadian-Arab origin, and his kids grew up... he prefers as teenagers - to be in the region, not in the Western world. Yes, we contacted the guy, he came for interview, and we are now ready to give him a job offer and we'll see if it works.

This employer reveals that labor markets are not quite as straightforward as simply being structured by nationality, and that more complex international associations are at play. In this example, the employer shows that nationality is not the only issue considered – he highlights this instance where nationality, ethnicity, and (possibly, implicitly) country of training vary. Ahmed pointed to the intersection of nationality with these other characteristics when they are at odds with mainstream expectations. Although this is only one explicit instance, this indicates a more complex method of job seeker assessment that goes beyond purely objective “nationality”.

CONCLUSION

The concept of “nationality” is not simply a marker of citizenship – in the context of Bahrain’s healthcare industry it takes on a socially constructed meaning of worker identity. For employers, nationality represents worker identities, indicating their notions of which nationalities are the best fit for different positions, and have surplus available workers. These worker identities are by no means representative of the original population of each nationality, but instead represent the narrower pool of workers that are visible to these employers. And so,

employers' knowledge of the non-representative pools of workers by country is heightened to embody the entire nationality. Citizens of Western countries are skilled doctors with specialties. Indian citizens are a good choice for doctors too, especially general practitioners. Indian and Pilipino/a citizens are an obvious choice for nurses. And employers turn to Bahraini citizens, the locals, to fill administrative positions. These worker identities transform labor queues into those ranked by nationality, where the most ideal nationality occupies the highest ranking for each job (or in some cases, more than one nationality is at the top of the labor queue).

These worker identities are importantly related to the recruitment process too. On the one hand, employers' choice of recruitment method is determined by the nationality they are targeting. I find that in the context of Bahrain's healthcare industry, recruitment methods play the role of targeting specific nationalities that are in the highest position in employers' labor queues. This is a particularly significant finding that has not been explored previously. However, recruitment is also a process where employers learn the information about nationalities to construct these worker identities in the first place. This is not always the case – employers also learn these from widespread ideas in society, or from other employers. However, when it is, recruitment is a fundamentally job seeker- or intermediary-driven process, where the employer receives unsolicited job applications and information about the job seeker pool.

This study provides two key theoretical implications. Firstly, I develop recruitment methods as a distinct means of workforce stratification. Existing research largely focuses on screening and selection as method of pre-hire stratification, emphasizing that employers (implicitly and/or explicitly) drive this process. I add to this theoretical understanding of hiring procedures by fleshing out recruitment methods as an additional source of workforce stratification – but notably, this is not solely an employer-driven process. A key theoretical

contribution of this study is that the demand for workers – employers’ decisions about recruitment methods – can in fact be driven by the supply of workers, through the recruitment process. A second theoretical implication of this paper is the furthering of “nationality” as a primary dimension of inequality and stratification in the GCC region. While existing research assumes the congruence of a worker’s nationality, ethnicity, and country of training, this study provides preliminary evidence of situations where these are discordant. Employers consider a job seeker’s nationality in conjunction with these other concepts, pointing to a more complex construction of worker identity than researchers currently describe. This study suggests that we need to move beyond solely nationality in examining GCC labor markets and societies.

This paper also has two main implications for policy development. Firstly, this study indicates the ineffectiveness of Bahrain’s current workforce nationalization policies. Employers’ notions of worker identity being tied to nationality are strong enough to justify high economic costs for specialized job positions. This indicates that policies need to not just address economic costs for employers, but rather address their understandings of worker identities. Secondly, this study suggests that labor market policies need to target recruitment practices in order to increase native employment levels. There is evidence of information flow difficulties, where employers often default to recruiting internationally without an initial domestic search. While further research needs to examine whether this process excludes willing and able native job seekers, this study suggests policy interventions mandating domestic worker searches.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, although the in-depth interviews do provide data for an exploratory topic, they are relatively few in number. Guest, Bunce, and

Johnson (2006) suggest that larger samples do not guarantee richer data, and find that the creation of new codes diminishes with additional interviews (after the sixth in particular). However, additional interviews often do generate novel data, especially among relatively heterogeneous respondents. The limited number of interviews may indicate that this study fails to capture employers who understand nationality in a distinct manner, and engage in alternative recruitment processes. For instance, it is entirely possible that there are other employers in Bahrain's healthcare industry who do not utilize these social constructions of nationality, including its role in recruitment. I also expect that my reliance on convenience sampling led to a non-representative sample of employers, especially in terms of nationality and job position. The networks I relied on to find respondents may have led to nationality homophily, and a bias towards higher status "employers". I expect that this study captures one understanding of how some employers engage in and make decisions about recruiting workers, but does not reveal the entirety of how this process works – both in the healthcare industry, and certainly on a national level. This indicates a likely discrepancy between the narrow findings of this study, and the reality of the study population.

Tying into these possible missing data is a second limitation – the lack of negative evidence. Creswell and Miller (2000:127) describe the value of this constructivist endeavor: "this search for disconfirming evidence provides further support of the account's credibility because reality...is multiple and complex". This study does not find negative evidence, which weakens the validity of the narrative accounts presented. Lewis and Lewis (1980) indicate the tendency for sociologists to deemphasize or ignore acts unobservable in existing research. Although non-occurrences of expected events are not presented in this study, it is important to acknowledge that these are entirely possible and should be included in future research. Cases where employers

do not use constructions of nationality as reported in the recruitment process, or use alternative constructions, would add important nuance to understandings of these complex labor market phenomena.

A third methodological limitation of this study is the potential biases arising from the sample and method of sample selection. Although researchers focusing on the Middle East acknowledge the need to often rely on non-probability convenience sampling (Zahra 2011), this is not without limitations. This study is not meant to be statistically generalizable, but using convenience sampling likely led to biases in the study sample. By relying on personal contacts, the study's sample may have an over- or under-representation of employers with a particular set of characteristics or dispositions, which in turn influenced my findings. For example, the nature of my social network may have systematically excluded employers in smaller scale medical clinics, who may have an entirely different understanding of worker identities and nationalities, and be more economically constrained in their recruitment decision-making. This inherent bias, resulting from the sample selection, undermines my ability to firmly state that this study describes the entire state of recruitment and related employer decision-making.

Lastly, it is possible that cross-cultural respondent bias may have caused respondents to emphasize certain methods of recruitment, and of particular nationalities. My status as a Western-educated individual may have prompted respondents to disproportionately highlight their hiring of workers from Western countries, and downplay or not accurately depict the extent of recruitment from other regions of the world. Tangentially, I expect that this method of data collection would not infer the existence of any illegal or grey-area employment practices, due to social desirability bias and the fear of potential repercussions. However, I also expect that my

case selection, of the healthcare industry, is an industry that is less likely to engage in these practices because of the relatively higher level of industry and professional regulation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the limitations, this study paves the way for future research in this area. Several next steps include: (1) understanding other contributors to the social construction of nationality as worker identities, (2) examining the process of recruitment in other industries and GCC countries, (3) situating these findings about recruitment in the broader process of hiring and employment – for example, examining the role of nationality in screening, selection, and post-hire measures, (4) further scholarship examining the employment experience across various skill levels in the GCC, and (5) taking a closer look at the interplay of nationality, ethnicity, and country of training.

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